# KIRIBATI

**A group of islands in the Pacific Ocean northeast of Australia. It is composed of 32 atolls (a coral island consisting of a reef surrounding a lagoon) and one raised coral island, dispersed over 1,351,000 square miles.**

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16803-8145

# Cable station on remote Fanning Island produced covers

**By Steve Pendleton**

Nowadays we are all used to instantaneous communication with just about any part of the world through various electronic means.

Not so long ago rapid transoceanic communication was available only via expensive, cumbersome and vulnerable undersea cables. Great Britain used cables to keep up with news of its far-flung colonial empire.

The cables were a remarkable achievement for their times, but the signals weakened over distance. Booster stations were required along the route, which is one explanation for Britain's acquisition of many remote islands that otherwise held little strategic or economic importance.

Places such as Ascension Island, the Seychelles, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Fanning Island became important for this reason.

Fanning Island was one of the most remote outposts of the cable network. Fanning is located in the Line Islands of the Central Pacific Ocean. Its only neighbors are other islands in the group, including Christmas and Washington islands and Palmyra atoll.

Fanning, also an atoll, was never settled by the Polynesians, although they probably used it as a way station on their migrations to Hawaii. This is rather strange, because with 13½ square miles of land, Fanning has quite a bit of space.

Nevertheless, Fanning remained unpopulated until the mid-1800s, when copra plantations were begun. Laborers from the Gilbert Islands and company overseers were settled there.

In 1888, Great Britain, annexed Fanning because it lay on the proposed route for the undersea cable. A cable relay station was built on the island in December 1902, and eventually 60 personnel moved in to man it.

Fanning was in those years a little paradise. Cable ships visited, which meant that fresh supplies were frequently available. Diversions included fishing, tennis and other sports.

**Figure 1. A Fanning Island cover mailed Nov. 6, 1935, via the New Zealand postal agency. The cover, franked with stamps of the 1935 Silver Jubilee issue, is addressed to Chingford, Essex, England.**

**Figure 2. An Official Mail registered cover mailed Sept. 30, 1924, from Fanning Island ("Fanning" at lower left). The cover is addressed to "The Staff Officer (Intelligence), Navy Office, Wellington, New Zealand."**

Regular mail service for the station personnel was important. A New Zealand postal agency was opened in late 1902. It remained in use until the adoption of Gilbert and Ellice Islands stamps in 1939.

The agency used New Zealand stamps, and two different types of postmark are known during its history.

One is a triple-ring postmark with "Fanning Island" at the top, struck on the cover shown in Figure 1. The cover, addressed to Chingford, Essex, England, was mailed Nov. 6, 1935.

The other is a single-ring circular datestamp with "Fanning Island" at the top.

The cable station came under attack by a German warship during World War I, but other than that it was remarkably peaceful.

This is why I have difficulty explaining the 1924 Fanning Island Official Mail registered cover shown in Figure 2.

The cover, inscribed "On His Majesty's Service" is addressed to "The Staff Officer (Intelligence), Navy Office, Wellington, New Zealand."

**Figure 3. The wax seal on the back of the Figure 2 cover.**

The cover bears the intersecting blue lines indicating registered mail, and it is marked "Rgd. [registered] Secret" in its upper-left corner. There is a "District Officer Fanning Island Gilbert Ellice Isds." handstamp in purple at its lower left. Written in at the bottom of the cover is "Fanning" and the date.

The wax seal on the back of the cover, shown graphically cropped in Figure 3, is inscribed "Deputy Commissioner Fanning Island."

**Figure 4. A souvenir cover postmarked Feb. 14, 1939, and addressed to New Zealand, marking the first day of postal service for Fanning Island by the Gilbert and Ellice Islands postal authority.**

**Figure 5. A censored cover mailed July 13, 1944, from Fanning Island. The cover is addressed to Auckland, New Zealand.**

About the only thing I can think of that would be secret intelligence emanating from Fanning would be reports on the movements of hostile shipping in the area.

In 1939, postal service for Fanning was transferred to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands postal authority. A souvenir cover postmarked Feb. 14, 1939, marking the first day of Gilbert and Ellice Islands postal service, is shown in Figure 4.

Note that the word "Ellice" is misspelled "Ellis" in the typed inscription at the upper left of the cover.

The cover shown in Figure 5 was mailed from Fanning Island on July 13, 1944. The cover is addressed to Auckland, New Zealand.

Mailed during World War II, this cover bears a boxed "Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony Passed by Censor No 1" handstamp at its right.

There was a small American military presence on Fanning Island during WWII. Army Post Office 967 provided mail service for these troops from February 1943 to July 1945.

Luckily, aside from a quick visit by a Japanese submarine, Fanning Island was again spared the violence of war.

In the late 1950s, nearby Christmas Island was the site of atomic bomb testing. British naval units often visited Fanning Island during this period, and you can find souvenir covers from their visits.

The cable station was closed in 1964, eclipsed by satellite communications.

Fanning Island, now known as Tabuaeran, is part of the island nation of Kiribati.

Some colonists from Kiribati settled on Tabuaeran, so new covers might still emanate from the island once known as Fanning.

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*Steve Pendleton has been collecting for about 30 years, specializing in Antarctic and faraway isles. He has published more than 450 articles about these subjects.* ■

# KIRIBATI

1979

# KIRIBATI

1979-80

# KIRIBATI

1979

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# KIRIBATI

1980

# KIRIBATI

1980

# KIRIBATI

1980-81

The covers in this collection were mailed from Fanning Island on October 23, 2000. They were canceled on Christmas Island on November 28, 2000 and were delivered in State College, PA on December 12, 2000.

Kiribati
12c
Commonwealth Day 14th March 1983
Kiribati
30c
Commonwealth Day 14th March 1983
Kiribati
50c
Commonwealth Day 14th March 1983
Kiribati
North Pacific Ocean
Kiribati
TUVALU
TOKELAU
COOK ISLANDS
Commonwealth Day 14th March 1983
Kiribati
12c
Commonwealth Day 14th March 1983
Kiribati
30c
Commonwealth Day 14th March 1983
Kiribati
50c
Commonwealth Day 14th March 1983
Kiribati
North Pacific Ocean
Kiribati
TUVALU
TOKELAU
COOK ISLANDS
Commonwealth Day 14th March 1983
$1
28.11.2000
KIRIBATI
CHRISTMAS ISLAND
Capt.J.Cook's
'RESOLUTION' 1777
$1
KIRIBATI
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USA
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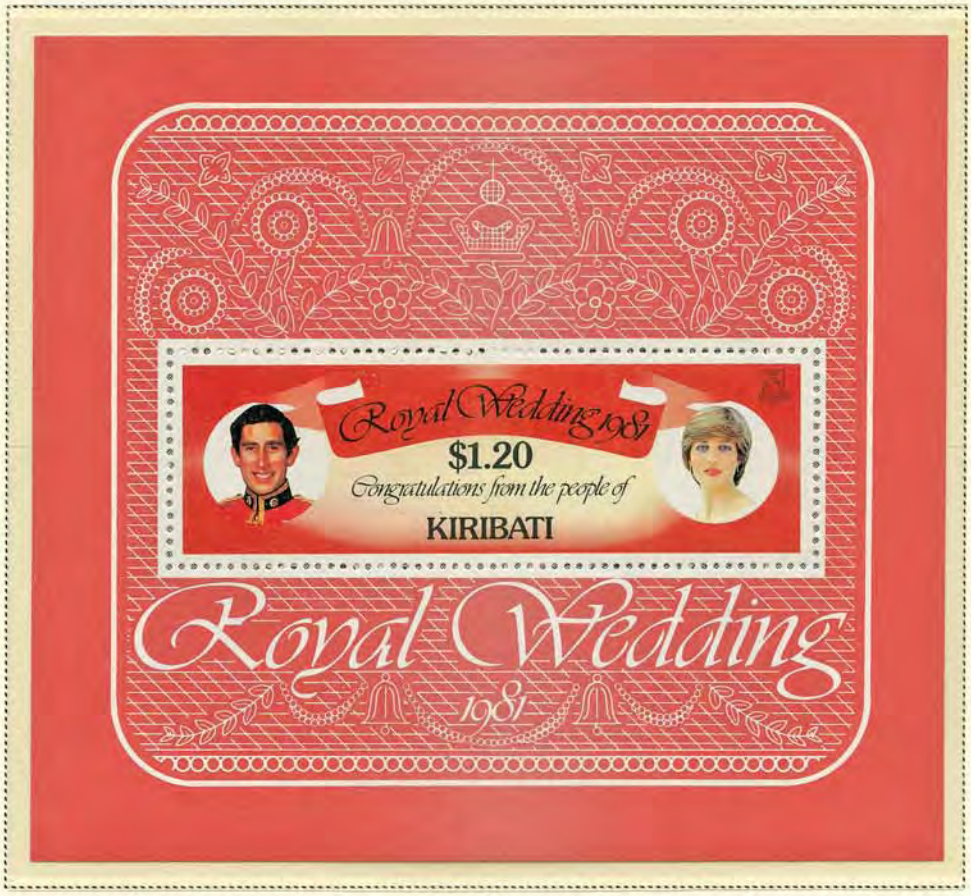
# KIRIBATI

1981-84

# KIRIBATI

1981



# KIRIBATI

1981-82

# KIRIBATI

1981-82

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16803X8145

# KIRIBATI

1982

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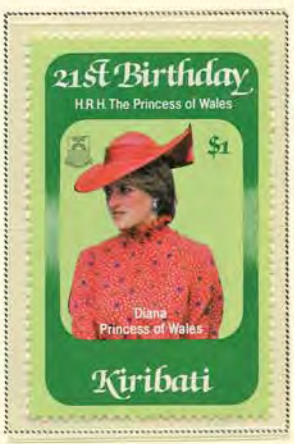
16803+8145

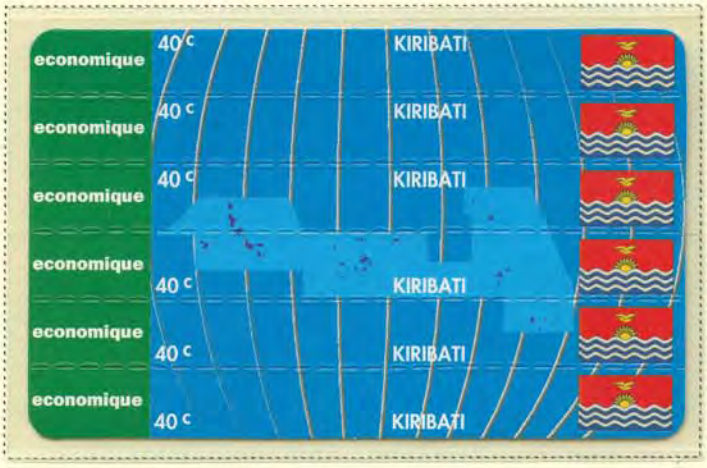
# KIRIBATI

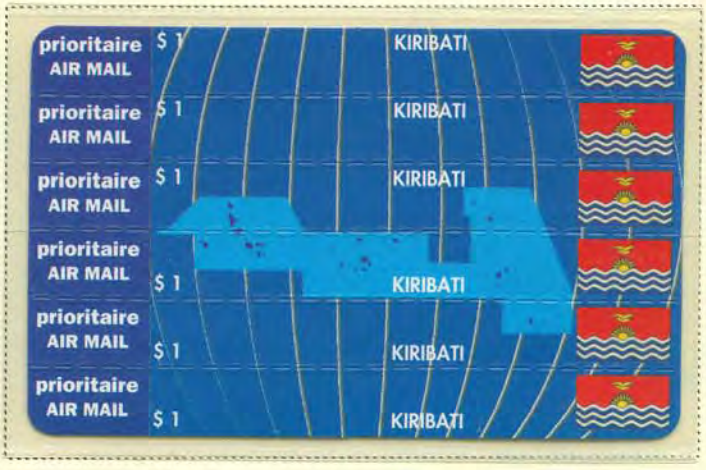
## 1982

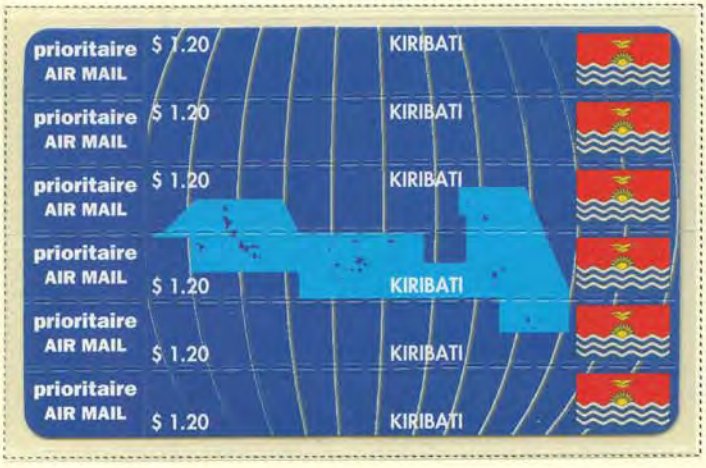


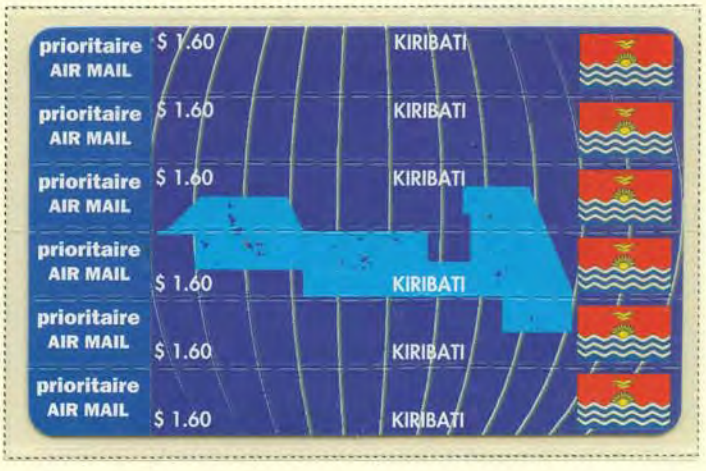
# KIRIBATI

1993



# KIRIBATI

1998

# KIRIBATI

1998

## *DIANA, PRINCESS OF WALES*
*1 July 1961 - 31 August 1997*

KIRIBATI 25c KIRIBATI 50c KIRIBATI 60c KIRIBATI 75c

$2.10 + 50c surcharge

*In respect of international sales, 50c from the total selling price shown on the souvenir sheet will be donated to The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund.*

Diana
Princess of Wales Memorial Fund

*In respect of all national sales, 50c from the total selling price will be donated to a designated local charity.*

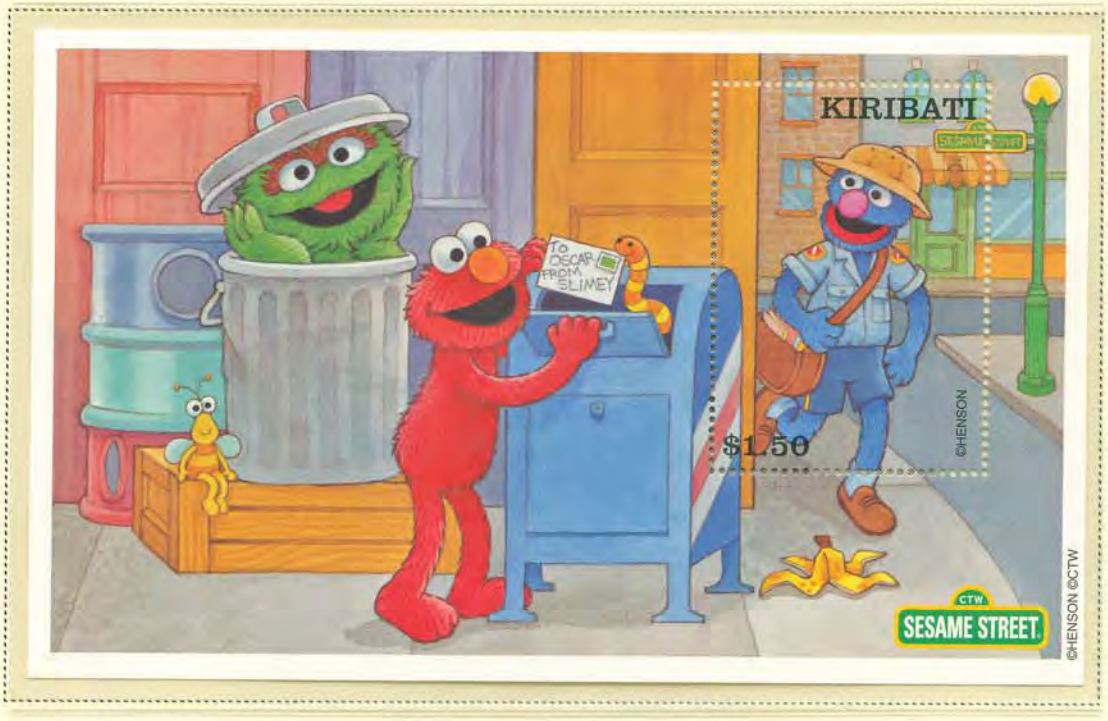
# KIRIBATI

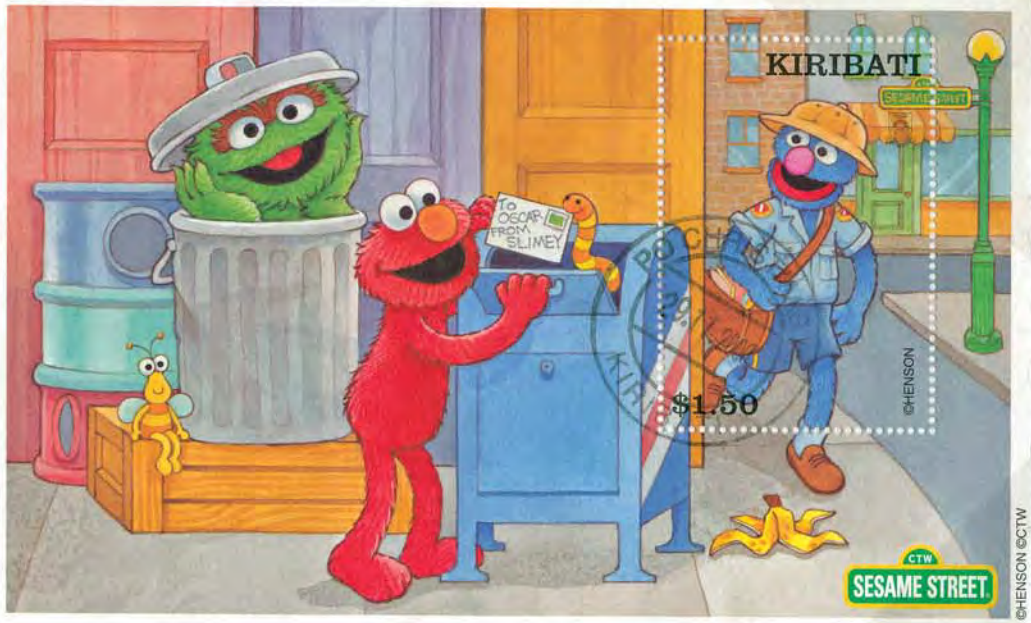
2000

SESAME STREET

# KIRIBATI

2000



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# KIRIBATI

1981

POSTAGE DUE STAMPS

# KIRIBATI

1981

OFFICIAL STAMPS

# KIRIBATI

1983

OFFICIAL STAMPS

**Thank you for taking a "tour" of**
***Kiribati***
**with us. These album pages have been prepared with items from the APS Reference Collection.**

**If you have duplicate stamps in your collection, please consider donating them to the APS Reference Collection to help us create future album pages.**